



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## UNREALITY IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

"Whatever is, is not. Whatever is not, is." No phrase can so well characterize the maze of reports emanating from modern Russia as this senseless antithesis. The snarled and tangled dreams of internationalism and imperialism, reactionary generals leading Chinese mercenary regiments in the armies of the proletariat, and once renowned revolutionists calling on the hated bourgeoisie for support against other followers of the same masters of thought,—all are intertwined in one lurid whole, until the mind becomes weary of the kaleidoscopic series of events and we are left to wonder if in this bedlam of 1921 we are really watching Holy Russia, the borderland of the inscrutable and changeless East.

The vivid realism which has been such a marked characteristic of Russian literature during the last century may seem to have been a poor prophet of the chaos of the present. The great authors have striven to paint life objectively; they have shown us the different types which move on the Russian stage,—the revolutionist, the noble, the superfluous man with neither will nor purpose, the peasant and the intellectual. Mysticism lay for a long time under the ban and for nearly half of the nineteenth century poetry was despised. Literature was used to preach a moral and to analyze the ills of Russia.

Nevertheless, the mystery of life, the spirit of eternal contradiction, appears even in Russian consistency. Think merely of the revolutionary influence exerted by Tolstoy, the apostle of non-resistance! His interpretation of the Gospels led him to erect a system which ran counter to every instinct of humanity and played havoc with every institution, human and divine. Uncompromising pacificism and theoretical anarchy, far from introducing the desired Golden Age, ushered in a period of war and discord the end of which can hardly be foreseen.

Dostoyevsky, the great psychologist, carried further still this study of discord. He sought the innermost recesses of the heart and brought back with him contradiction after contradiction. Space would fail to mention more than a few of these unsolved

riddles. Why, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, is it Ivan who tells the story of the Grand Inquisitor? This narrative, one of the most notable descriptions in world literature of the rejection of Christ by his self-styled disciples, is conceived not by the religious Alesha but by the atheistic and cynical Ivan. Is it any wonder, then, that later he is tortured by the return of his devil in whom he does and does not believe? Yet this is similar to his treatment of ethics, in which he shows that morality is ultimately dependent upon religion, a thesis warmly approved by the conservatives, but employed by him with a quite different motive. In *Crime and Punishment* the poor, sick, discouraged egoist Raskolnikov develops and applies the theory of the superman before Nietzsche and acts upon it sanely, as Dostoyevsky holds, but insanely in the opinion of most alienists. In *The Idiot* Myshkin is mentally deficient and abnormally keen in his judgment of human character and his appreciation of good. The analysis of these mysteries of the mind forms a large part of the motifs of Dostoyevsky.

The more modern school of Neo-Romanticism has inherited this same love for the unreal and the abnormal. It figures in many of the productions of such authors as Sologub. Thus in *Hungering and Thirsting*, the crusaders who believe in their senses and realize that they are lost amid the sands and desolation of the Syrian desert perish miserably. The poor victims of the delusion that they see around them water and food and that they are divinely led by a mystic staff come safely to Damascus, their desired goal.

A similar willingness to believe in the reality of an unreality is found in another of Sologub's stories, *You Will Remember and Will Not Forget*. Here we have not the search for a material result. A widower has loved his wife so sincerely that he sees her in his second bride. Whether she be present or not, he talks as if his first wife were with him, until the second in a moment of self-abnegation agrees that the soul of her predecessor is now dwelling in her.

This theme, used here to satisfy the conscience and quiet the soul of an old man, is not always destined to bring peace and happiness in its train. Valery Bryusov, in *For Herself or*

*Another*, employs much the same type of uncertainty as a particularly excruciating instrument of torture. The hero, who has cruelly abandoned his beloved many years before, suddenly meets in Switzerland a woman whom he at once takes for his former sweetheart. Stung with remorse, he confesses his fault, but Elizavyeta Vasilyevna pays no attention to him; on the contrary, she declares that she is really Ekaterina Vladimirovna and that she has never met him previously. When she finds it impossible to convince him, she suddenly changes and declares that she is Elizavyeta Vasilyevna, in order to take vengeance upon him for abandoning his former love. In proportion to the seriousness with which she attempts the new rôle his doubts increase, but he cannot come to a definite decision. When she finally leaves the hotel, his mind is no nearer a solution of the riddle and he is forced to remain in ignorance whether the torment which she inflicted upon him was for herself or another.

The same problem appears again in even more gruesome form in *The Mirror*, by the same author. The uncanny power exercised by the "I" that dwells in the mirror over the "I" that is incarnate in the personal physical body, holds the real woman spellbound and ultimately leads her to change places with her reflection. The rightful possessor of the human body now becomes endowed with the same supernatural power which her rival of the mirror had possessed. Like that, she strives to strengthen her control of her double, lures her back to the mirror, and finally by a desperate effort induces a second change and orders the mirror immediately taken from the house. But she is never afterwards sure as to which is her true self.

The volume of stories entitled *The Axis of the Earth* contains many studies in the confusion of the real and the unreal. These range from frank studies of dream criminality to *The Underground Prison*, in which a noble Italian girl, confined by the Turks in an underground prison, treats the whole episode upon her release as a bad dream.

The fondness for antiquity manifested in the last-named story is shown again in *Rhea Silvia*, a story of the last days of the Roman Empire. A young girl, thinking that she is Rhea Silvia, meets in a ruined palace a young Goth, whom she takes

to be Mars. She has a child by him, but is so strongly convinced that she is the famed ancestor of the Roman race that she hurls herself into the Tiber to complete the analogy, believing to the end that she has born the twins Romulus and Remus.

This tendency of Bryusov's to place the scenes of his stories in remote times is even better exemplified by one of his more pretentious tales,—*The Fiery Angel*, or, to quote the full title, *The Fiery Angel, or a True Story of the Devil who at Various Times Appeared to an Innocent Virgin in the Shape of a Holy Angel, Luring her to Sinful Actions; of the Ungodly Practices of Magic, Alchemy, Astrology, Cabalistic Art, and Necromancy; of the Trial of the Aforesaid Virgin under the Presidency of His Reverence, the Bishop of Trier; and also of Meetings and Conversations with the Knight and Thrice Doctor Agrippa of Nettesheim, and Doctor Faust, Written by an Eyewitness*. The novel is a careful study of the sixteenth century, presented in the form of a narrative of a contemporary author, edited with introduction and notes. The minute realism of the work, the careful scholarship involved, and the technical information regarding magic and astrology, show the great learning of the author, although they render the book slightly erudite and heavy. The plot is relatively simple, but the confusion between Graf Hendrich von Otterheim and the Angel Madiel and the frequent manifestations of the supernatural confound the boundaries of the real and the unreal. The hero of the novel, Ruprecht, a German landsknecht, wealthy from his campaigns in Spain and the Indies, is returning home to his aged parents, when he is suddenly involved with Renata, a beautiful young girl who is grievously tormented by an evil spirit. In her youth she had had as playmate the angel Madiel. Her misdeeds drove him away, and from then on she devoted herself to seeking him. She finds him in Graf von Otterheim, with whom she lives for some time, but he disappears suddenly like Madiel. In company with Ruprecht, Renata wanders about, sending her knight on errands to various people,—sorcerers, magicians, astrologers, even bidding him visit Satan's court—yet all to no avail. The Graf-angel does not materialize. When he does appear, he seems to be no angel, but a shameless knight who insults her grossly.

Renata herself appears in a dubious light, now as the friend, now as the mistress of Ruprecht, who is utterly unable to understand his fair companion. She goads him to challenge the Graf to a duel, only to forbid it when it is too late. Finally, she leaves the landsknecht and he, long since stripped of his wealth by her mad whims, finds himself constrained to take service again. He travels for a while with Doctor Faustus and Mephistopheles and witnesses their pranks as recorded by Marlowe and Goethe, including the resurrection of Helen of Troy. Soon he escapes the evil influence of this wandering pair and joins the Graf von Vellen. Here, to his surprise, he learns that a neighboring convent harbors a young girl, Sister Maria, who is in the power of the devil. He has no doubt that this is Renata, the object of his hopeless devotion. Unfortunately, as his suspicion becomes certainty, the Bishop appears on the scene and tries Sister Maria for communion with the devil. She confesses, and her story, embodying all the fantastic conceptions of the age, leads to the pronouncement of a death sentence. Determined to save her, Ruprecht arouses the sympathy of his friends and they consent to help him. With the greatest daring and with no thought of his own danger, he enters her dungeon cell, only to meet the usual treatment. Now she caresses him most affectionately and begs him to save her. The next moment she turns upon him, regards him as a foe and bids him begone. In one of her paroxysms of repulsion she dies in agony. Left alone and with his money gone, Ruprecht does not dare to return home. He hides near his father's house until he can see his parents, and then sadly returns to Spain to take part in another series of campaigns. Throughout the whole novel the natural and supernatural are inextricably confused, so that the landsknecht never knows with what power he is compelled to deal.

If in this novel the scene is laid in mediæval Germany, *Earth* carries us to the farthest limits of the future, where the believers in human progress and the advocates of the final destruction of humanity join in one last act of devastation. We are guided to a mysterious underground realm, the last refuge of despairing humanity on a dying earth. Elaborate machinery has made it possible to confine the last particles of air in many-

storied buildings far beneath the earth, where have gathered the last survivors of mankind. With inexorable slowness the hand of death reaches for them also. The rooms are slowly falling to ruin, floor after floor is abandoned, and the water supply runs more and more slowly for the diminishing population. The total annihilation of the community is expedited by the Liberators, a mystic order of assassins eager for the day when the buildings shall have been evacuated. Yet all is not happy in the doomed city. In vain does the seer Teopinski urge a noble death upon his fellows; in vain does the prefect strive to maintain by force the orders and manners of the past. Even the iron discipline of the Liberators breaks at the mention of new life and few there are that follow the indomitable servant of Death, Teotl. What is the rumor? Nevatl, more venturesome than his fellows, climbs to the top of the massive structure and for the first time in centuries a man sees the sun. He at once decides that if the human race will but rend asunder the mighty roof and come out of its caverns, all will be well. The entire population repeats the cry of Life, Life! The new idea charms the multitude and all press downward to turn the mighty levers that control the titanic machinery of the roof. The prefect, helpless in his opposition, commits suicide. Yet the chief of the Liberators is not discouraged, for he alone has learned the full secret from the seer Teopinski: that there is no air on earth. As the roof parts, he does not lament—he boasts of the approaching end. The air disappears in the void and the servants of Death and the worshippers of Life fall prostrate together as the cold and barren curse of a dead world carries to its doom the last remnants of mankind. We do not find in this drama the mingling of the supernatural and the real which so characterizes the other works which we have considered, but the gruesome confusion of life and death in the dim future illustrates another phase of the same problem. Are the quest for life and the thirst for death one and the same? Not infrequently they are, yet Bryusov presents the problem in a most striking way. The final scene, with its union of prayers and curses, of hope and despair, brings forward this question, around which the whole drama is composed.

*Earth* presents a contradiction, but to a civilization which is poised on an abyss of disorders and conflicts, the most significant work of Bryusov's is *The Republic of the Southern Cross*. The strange fate of Star City seems almost a prophecy of the chaos into which Russia herself has fallen and in which Bryusov is playing some part. Star City is a highly developed industrial community situated in the Antarctic, with the City Hall directly at the South Pole. Hence, on leaving the building, one must always go north, whichever way he turn. The constitution of the city is as remarkable as its site. The Republic of which it is the capital is a perfect democracy. Full citizenship is open only to miners, who number about sixty per cent. of the population. The citizens elect a council which is invested with full power, but the directors of the mines, a trust absorbed by the government on the creation of the new State, are represented on the council and are always able to impose their will on the elected members. The despotism, or, let us say, the benevolent care of the council, extends to the most minute details of life,—to clothing, the decorations of the houses, the food of the inhabitants. In a word, no portion of life is free from its protecting care. On the other hand, the workmen are better off than anywhere else in the world, their hours of labor are shorter, their pay better, and pensions and retirement privileges make them the envy of the world. Of course, there is perfect liberty of the press, but no article can be printed criticizing the government. Any discontent is at once suppressed by counter-propaganda, or, in stubborn cases, political murders are not unknown. Despite this fact, Star City remains happy and peaceful until a strange calamity falls upon it,—the *mania contradicens*. It can be seen at once that all the terms of political life, liberty, freedom, democracy, all are utterly meaningless as contrasted with autocracy, despotism, slavery. Even the sense of direction is confused under the great dome that shelters the luxurious city from the Antarctic storms. What is this new disease? It has always existed in the Republic, but never in a virulent form, and at first it is hardly noticed. Street-car conductors begin to pay their passengers instead of collecting fares. From this it is but a step to the neglect of signals by engineers



who intend to stop but fail to apply the brakes. Wrecks occur on the railroads. Nurses give poison to their patients instead of medicine. Life and property are endangered by the sudden and rapidly increasing number of cases of contradiction. In vain sane and healthy leaders protest against the new malady. In vain one remedy after another is applied. Nothing seems to be of any use. Transportation becomes worse and worse; airship lines, railroads, industry,—all are irreparably ruined. Star City is gradually isolated from the world and becomes the prey of insensate starving mobs. Horace Deville, with a handful of followers, barricades himself in the City Hall and defends it bravely. Then the wireless apparatus fails, the building is stormed, and all the garrison are massacred. When help finally arrives from the outside world, only a few wretched people remain in the once great and flourishing Star City, now through its contradictions a city of the dead.

The vividness and realism of the last days of the doomed metropolis remind us of the ghastly sacks and massacres to which we have become accustomed by five years of war. Yet this ruin of a civilization may seem a prophecy of the fate of Russia, for the peculiar union of liberty and slavery existing in the Republic of the Southern Cross sounds strangely like some of the experiments attempted in the Colossus of the North during the last few years. In reality, Bryusov was endeavoring to study the inherent contradictions which exist in a hypothetical system, and which can ruin any form of government if they are pursued with a demand for entire consistency.

In these few works, selected from the more modern Russian literature, we notice certain characteristics which are quite alien to many of the older authors. The members of the Neo-Romantic School devoted themselves to a more careful study of the abnormal than did their predecessors, and in their investigation of the unreal they failed to emphasize many of the social aims which were deemed so important a half-century or less ago. They were accordingly attacked with great bitterness for their refusal to regard their entire literary work as one branch of the movement to overthrow the government of the Tsar. They persevered in their position, however, and their works represent one

aspect of Russian character. It may not be without interest to note that Bryusov and most of his associates in this school remained in Russia during the Bolshevist régime, in one capacity or another. Most of them did not attempt to leave, and we may perhaps be pardoned for seeing behind the veil in that unhappy country some trace of the problem which they strove to answer. In the reports of strange and even fantastic doings which have been spread so widely abroad, we may feel that conditions in contemporary Russia may be treated as an embodiment of their fundamental thesis: the reality of unreality and the unreality of reality.

CLARENCE AUGUSTUS MANNING.

Columbia University.

### GIFTS

I would have given you other gifts than this,—  
Songs and clear days and little prayers fulfilled,—  
But rest is His,  
And rest is all He willed.

I would have reared you up with little joys,  
Sheathed you with love as linnets from the sun,  
But all my toys  
Are poorer than His one.

I would have laid life's harvest in your arms,  
Not these small windflowers silvering on the stem,  
Their baby charms  
Bidding you match with them.

I would have led you where the meadows waken,  
Flung you the summer's treasure that they keep;—  
But you have taken  
God's early rose of sleep.

MARJORIE L. C. PICKTHALL.

Victoria, British Columbia.